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MANAGEMENT COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
U. S. Department of Agriculture

A summary of significant events of
interest to USDA management

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SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING DECEMBER 2, 11 AM, ROOM 218-A..... Principle focus on McManis Associates critical analysis of USDA's MBO system. Also discuss OMF's plans to carry out programming, budgeting, MBO, and monitoring exercise during FY 1976. (Contact: J.P. Bolduc, SEC, ext. 77247)

USDA TAKES FURTHER STEPS TO BEEF UP BUDGET/MBO PROGRAM EVALUATION STUDIES.... Office of Secretary in second year of major changes in budget program analysis activities to substantially upgrade effectiveness of direction provided to agencies and reduce amount of work required to participate in budget and program tracking analysis process. Major steps during past year:

- ... Coordinated review of agency plans, programs and proposals throughout budget process by Office of Planning and Evaluation (OP&E), Office of Management and Finance (OMF), and Office of Audit (OA) to avoid duplication and reduce confusion.
- ... Initiated budget/program review in May instead of August; held Spring Preview meetings with agencies.
- ... Policy issues developed during Preview meetings, presented to Top Staff at Camp David to provide more specific guidance to agencies for development of 1977 budget estimates about July 1.
- ... Recommendations regarding agency allowances obtained on more formalized basis from Program Assistant Secretaries.
- ... Secretary provided allowance letters to each agency specifying policy guidance for remainder of FY 76 and all of FY 77.

New initiatives for this year:

- ... Transfer OP&E to OMF to avoid duplication, reduce confusion and assure cohesiveness of purpose.
- ... Implement tracking system for Departmental policy/program/management improvement objectives, secretarial issues, and priorities, significant issues and departmental objectives after Spring Preview and prior to Camp David session to assure USDA input before OMB's Spring Preview sessions.
- ... Agency guidance resulting from Camp David session to be made more specific to preclude agency estimates exceeding OMB ceiling.
- ... Provide integrated long-range planning/specific program guidance (1978-1982) letters to agencies.
- ... Assistant Secretaries to provide initial reactions to agency requests and program priorities before Secretary's hearings with agencies to preclude agencies from covering areas which will not be recommended for increases to the Secretary.
- ... Provide OMB with USDA budget briefing in October including estimates, priorities and providing dialogue for discussion of key issues before OMB makes final budget decisions.

(Contact: J.P. Bolduc , SEC, ext. 77247)

CONTROLLED CORRESPONDENCE ACKNOWLEDGMENT REQUIRES INCREASED EMPHASIS.....

Department answered 67% of controlled correspondence on time during October, a slight improvement over September's 64%. However, of 632 pieces of overdue correspondence pending in USDA at end of month, only 212 had been acknowledged. This is particularly significant, since if all overdue correspondence had been acknowledged we would have answered 85% of controlled correspondence on time in October. Each agency should make concerted effort to insure that EACH PIECE of controlled correspondence is acknowledged BEFORE it becomes overdue. (Contact: Jerry Pepper, 00, ext. 78393)

PRANGER MEETS WITH CSC RE PROBLEMS IN RECRUITING MINORITIES AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN.....Brought out at November 18 meeting with Ray Jacobson, Executive Director, CSC: (1) CSC actions to "strengthen merit system" have had adverse affect on recruitment of minorities; and (2) lack of CSC guidelines to facilitate recruitment of minorities and women within context of merit system, and absence of central office guidance to CSC Regional offices regarding EEO recruitment. Mr. Jacobson agreed to need to develop more consistent approach to evaluation of EEO programs in CSC regions. Said CSC would consider forming task force of Departmental Personnel Directors to establish Government-wide guidelines on EEO recruiting programs. Several internal initiatives taken by USDA to improve recruitment of minorities and women. Unless CSC can provide assistance to Departments in form of guidelines and coordination of CSC Regional Offices activities, past level of progress in EEO may not be maintained. (Contact: Sy Pranger, 0P, ext. 73585)

"ADMINISTRATIVE HOT-LINE" WORKING SATISFACTORILY IN OFFICE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION.....Allows all employees in D.C. area to call and leave message regarding concerns, complaints or suggestions about administrative services. Open 24 hours daily; comments transcribed each morning for action. Most of complaints have involved building maintenance problems, parking space problems, and delays in mail service or receiving travel expense checks. Will be open through December. Line provided as means for employees to make concerns known to key administrative officials in Department without having to go through red tape of typical complaint procedure for small items. (Contact: J.P. Bolduc, SEC, ext. 77247)

USDA EMPLOYEES HONORED.....

- ... Mrs. Wilda H. Martinez, Staff Scientist, ARS, has been selected as one of six outstanding women in Federal Government to receive Federal Woman's Award for 1975. Presentation will be made at a dinner on December 3, 1975.
- ... Paperwork Planning and Systems Branch, AMS, among 15 individuals and groups receiving Federal Paperwork Management Awards on November 26, 1975. Mr. David H. Leavitt, Branch Chief, accepted award of Special merit for group of 12 employees. (Contact: Mae Paulsen, 0P, ext. 75618)

ADP AIDS OA DAILY.....Computer centers in D.C., New Orleans, Kansas City, and St. Louis supply new information to improve OA's performance:

- ... Check of FmHA loan file against USDA employee list showed 84 loans made to employees in 9 States checked.
- ... Data on gas credit cards analyzed to find extra low or high consumption for 6-month period, which may isolate credit card abuses.
- ... Farmers applying for FmHA emergency loans were computer-checked to assure they had subtracted FCIC insurance awards when reporting total losses.
- ... Analysis of recipient names and addresses for State food stamp audit divulged duplicate issuances in all 22 counties checked.
- ... Distribution of specialists' time use on lagging program analyzed to indicate cause of lag--need for more specialists, as claimed, or specialists' involvement in activities other than their program-related specialties.
- ... Survey Assist Packages--standard collection of data useful for selecting audit samples--routinely supplied on-site auditors, who estimate 1- to 3-day savings in audit time. Since July 1, 1975, survey assist packages have been furnished for 300 audits covering 513 counties. (Contact: Donald Nelson, OA, ext. 75907)

EEO COMMITTEE MEETS WITH STAFF OFFICE HEADS.....This first in series of meetings with Assistant Secretaries and Agency Heads to discuss their EEO Programs. Key points discussed were extent of their personal involvement in EEO Program, their identification of problem areas in EEO, and statement of how they intended to overcome problems. Chairman of EEO Committee following up by letter and asking more specific questions not covered in meeting. Assistant Secretary and Agency Heads will be invited back to Committee for report of progress after 90-day period. (Contact: Robert Birdsong, Jr., OP, ext. 72973)

OEO MIGRANT SURVEY AIM TO DETERMINE PROBLEMS OF MIGRANTS IN GETTING USDA PROGRAM BENEFITS.....Surveys, to date, conducted at transient sites. Next stage to conduct surveys at home base of migrants. Problems identified so far relate primarily to FNS and FmHA programs. Migrants have serious problems in participating in Food Stamp Program, primarily due to method of determining household's net income for food stamp purposes. Lack of knowledge of programs, no stable address, language barriers, lack of transportation and great distances of food stamp issuance centers added to problem. In FmHA programs, regulations for qualification in housing loans and farm loans, serve to disqualify or place greater burden on migrants attempting to get out of migrant stream. (Contact: R. Peer, OEO, ext. 77327)

SECURITY EQUIPMENT TESTED.....Obtained from Minneapolis Commodity Office. Test to determine whether equipment meets needs of Phase I security plan adopted by Management Council for perimeter security of Washington complex. No problems encountered; testing should be completed within ten days. Specifications then be submitted to GSA, Technical Services Branch, for review and to Management Council for final approval. (Contact: Tony Musolino, OI, ext. 74104)

GSA RESPONDS TO USDA ON FUNDING OF FEDERAL INFORMATION CENTERS (FIC).....
 Council expressed concern about this at Sept. 18 meeting. GSA advised USDA ranks 12th among 17 major benefitting agencies sharing cost of program. Rationale of dividing cost equally: high volume agencies (IRS, Social Security, CSC, etc.) mostly direct referral calls; Agriculture, Commerce, Interior, etc. inquiries more substantive, requiring degree of research. Among inquiries - meat and produce inspection, statistics on farm production, food stamps, free school lunch programs, forest service, and requests for many of USDA free consumer brochures distributed by FICs. (Phoenix FIC presently mailing out 3,000 applications for permits to cut Christmas trees on National Forest land.) GSA considered separate appropriation as program grown; OMB not responded favorably. USDA's Office of Secretary further pursuing FIC funding through OMB. (Contact: J.P. Bolduc, SEC, ext. 77247)

DID YOU KNOW THAT FNS:

- ... Provided food stamp benefits averaging over \$23 a person to 18.5 million persons in September, down from peak of 19.4 million persons in April.
- ... Has virtually ended direct food distribution to needy families, following 1973 Congressional mandate to extend food stamps nationwide as principal means of family food assistance. Participation in family food distribution is down to around 100,000 persons on a few Indian reservations, which were granted option to continue that program through June 30, 1977.
- ... Arranges for production and shipping of \$700 million worth of food stamp coupons a month, for which program participants pay \$275 of their own money. Food Stamp Coupons are delivered to 3,800 shipping points designated by state welfare agencies. In turn, they responsible for issuance of stamps to recipients through 14,000 local outlets, including banks, post offices and government-run facilities.
- ... Maintains computer-assisted food stamp accountability system that handles on monthly basis: 6,770 reports, from key points within states, on coupon inventories, coupon sales, and deposits of recipients' cash payments; and 70,000 individual deposit cards confirming cash deposits to Federal Reserve. Information cross-checked and compared with in-house records on food stamp inventory and shipments. States notified semiannually of any discrepancies and held financially liable for shortages.
- ... Is responsible for monitoring participation of about 249,000 retail and wholesale food outlets authorized to accept food stamps. FNS field representatives work actively to minimize retailer-wholesaler violations of program rules. In fiscal year 1975, only 746 firms were disqualified from accepting food stamps for periods ranging from 30 days to 3 years, as result of violations.
- ... Helps provide school lunches for 25 million American children in 88,000 schools. Of these, about 10 million youngsters receive their lunches free or at reduced cost of 20¢ or less, because of family need.
- ... Provides, on average, at least 23¢ in federal funds and commodities for each of the 4 billion lunches served annually through National School Lunch Program. While actual cost to prepare school lunch averages 90¢, full price to elementary student ranges between 35¢ and 45¢. For high school students, price range 40¢ to 60¢.